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Ex-Agent Fights CIA Deceit

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Ralph McGehee spent 25 years in the CIA. Now he's trying to set the record straight.

"The first 15 years I spent with the CIA I was a totally committed officer," McGehee said last night at UT. "I was dedicated to the agency and its mission in the world."

But McGehee said he began to realize that the CIA that was created as an intelligence agency was primarily a covert operations agency. He said it supports some foreign governments and tries to overthrow others.

He said the CIA is trying to overthrow the government of Nicaragua and trying to influence election returns in El Salvador by buying votes and legislators.

"Misinformation is a major part of its covert action function," he said, "and the American people are the primary target of its misinformation operations."

McGehee's personal disillusionment began when he was stationed

in Thailand and he discovered he was not allowed to report accurate information about the Communist movement there or the truth about Vietnam. The agency, he said, would not allow him to report the truth.

For the past 10 years of his service in the CIA, he said, "I fought to get the CIA to recognize the truth in Vietnam. But the presidential policy was to win the war. President Johnson, and then Nixon, wanted optimistic information."

McGehee fought the CIA from inside for 10 years, and then he retired at age 48 and wrote a book called, "Deadly Deceits: My 25 years in the CIA." He is very critical of the agency in the book, which took him three years to write and two years to be approved for publication by the CIA.

"Everything I say in the book is drawn from official documents," he said. "They (CIA officials) played all sorts of games, although the book contained no classified information."

"I had to show them (the CIA)

word for word where they had already released the information in the book," he continued. The difference, he said, was that the information contained in other books was used to draw positive conclusions about the CIA.

It still took a story in The Washington Post to force the CIA to approve the document for publication, McGehee said. That was in February 1983.

McGehee said the opening of mail and surveillance of citizens that caused such controversy in the mid 1970s is still being done by the CIA. President Reagan issued an executive order in 1981 that allows the CIA to conduct covert operations in the United States, he said.

McGehee said he plans to write another book about the CIA, cataloging operations in different parts of the world.

In addition to his speech as part of the Issues Committee program, he is participating in the Academic Exposition at UT, which runs through Friday.